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## ABSTRACT

This study examines writing apprehension in bilinguals, a common problem among Puerto Rican college students who take composition courses in both their native Spanish and English as a second language. A questionnaire designed to determine the sources of apprehension was administered to three student groups: graduate students of English, freshman English composition students, and freshman Spanish composition students. Results indicate that the sources of writing apprehension vary according to the language used and the student's writing experience. The causes of the differences appear to stem from traditional teaching methods and the student's past experiences with writing. The process-oriented approach to writing instruction, with less emphasis on static rules and sentence-level stylistics, would help to reduce the anxiety caused by premature editing and attitude in undergraduates. Graduate student responses suggest that apprehension decreases with experience and maturity. (Included are five pages of references, the questionnaire, and data tables.) (MSE)

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Sources of Writing Block

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Sources of Writing Block in Bilingual Writers

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## Abstract

In their freshman year in college, Puerto Rican students take composition courses in both Spanish and English. Although the rhetorical structure of the final product, the composition, may respond to national writing styles in the two languages, studies show the composition process to be similar. Writing instructors in either language find similar problems in student compositions, regardless of the language code used.

One of the difficulties students have in both languages is blocking, or apprehension about writing. Although some aspects of the composition process may be universal, the authors assumed that in bilingual writers the source of writing block depended on the language used. This paper presents the results of a questionnaire designed to determine the sources of bilingual students' apprehension in writing by considering three groups of bilingual writers: graduate students in English, freshman English composition students, and freshman Spanish composition students. The results suggest some insights on the nature of blocking in a native language (Spanish) and a second language (English), which may then lead to ways of helping bilingual students to overcome blocking.

## Sources of Writing Block in Bilingual Writers

## Introduction

This report presents the findings of a descriptive study designed to compare instances of writer's block in English and Spanish, among and within three groups of bilingual writers. More specifically, the research tries to determine if the same writing factors stymie both the novice bilingual writer and the practiced bilingual writer. We are assuming that all writers block, but for different causes, and that these causes will endure if not diagnosed and remedied.

Beginning in the 1960s, a new focus on composition began to emerge through the efforts of the National Council of Teachers of English. At this time, the written models which students were asked to emulate began to lose their pedagogical force. Thus, while the previous emphasis was on editing (e.g. the achievement of conventional correctness in the standard written language through attention to such low-level skills as punctuation, spelling, etc.), current research and theorists in the area of first language writing generally agree that writing consists of three major nonlinear, recursive, process-centered strategies: planning, writing, and reviewing (Emig, 1971; Flower & Hayes, 1984; Hayes & Flower, 1981b; Murray, 1980). Similarly, research and theorists on second language composing agree that bilingual writers follow essentially the same composing process as

monolingual writers do (Chelala, 1981; Jones, 1981, 1982, 1985; Martin-Betancourt, in preparation; Zamel, 1982, 1983).

Much writing instruction currently focuses on those process-centered strategies for writing, in which students have ample time for invention procedures rather than retrieving past experience alone, write multiple drafts, at times with the aid of computers, and receive real audience feedback on their writing from their peers and teachers rather than comments only on the observance of the perfection of the language code. Thus, writers delay attention to editing as the final activity of the writing process. While these process-centered strategies seem to help the writer produce an ample amount of text, and please most, a few students still fail to produce enough competent prose in either language. Thus, in the '70s, research began to look beyond the writing strategies of these noncompetent writers and into the cognitive dimensions of writer's block in an effort to explain the reasons why these students were apparently incompetent writers. Current theories of composing hold that writing encompasses diverse types of knowledge because writing is both a social and cognitive activity (Purves, 1982:343). It is social because it involves other people in that writers rarely write for themselves but for an audience. Writing is also a purposeful cognitive act because "it requires knowledge of the subject matter, knowledge of the conventions of language and of the grapholect, and knowledge of the potential and actual readers" (Purves 1982:344). Blocking

may result from the use of two languages to accommodate the interactions between these types of knowledge, while simultaneously juggling a number of process-centered strategies.

Rose (1984:3) sees writer's block as "an inability to begin or continue writing for reasons other than a lack of basic skills or commitment." Rose adds that writer's block is a broad term for writer's dysfunction, which subsumes such cognitive variables as lateness in turning in work, premature editing of drafts, the ability to cope with complex writing tasks, and the attitudes of the writer toward writing. Each of these variables or dysfunctions measures different aspects of blocking, while blocking itself is the main behavioral indicator of dysfunction.

#### Review of Related Literature

From the 1970s to the present, the current research on blocking with native English writers can be divided into two groups according to the theoretical premises on which the studies are based: (a) apprehension produces blocking and (b) blocking produces writing apprehension or anxiety. Daly (1979:37), who advocates the first model, defines apprehension as the "general avoidance of writing and situations perceived by the individual to potentially require some amount of writing accompanied by the potential for evaluation of that writing."

Daly and Haley (1984) note that writing anxiety studies take two forms, the dispositional and the situational. The

dispositional model of writing anxiety research assumes that writers can be ranked in terms of their degree of apprehension toward writing, making the dispositional model person-specific and comparative in nature. But individuals themselves display dispositional variations in their apprehension and anxiety.

The situational model, on the other hand, views writing apprehension as a disposition and anxiety as a situation response. It assumes that the problem is transitory rather than enduring (Daly & Haley, 1984:260) and dependent on the context of the writing. The context or the environment is said to influence both the writing process and the product. The situational model of writing anxiety/apprehension is based on the psychological assessment of "state" and seen, therefore, as transitory anxiety. Of the two models of writing under anxiety/apprehension, the situational construct is the less researched.

Most of the blocking studies conducted with native speakers of English under the apprehension/anxiety model are correlative in nature (Daly, 1985). As Daly reports, writing apprehension correlates with (a) performance in counter attitudinal tasks (Toth, 1975), with (b) actual writing performance and the quality of the message (Book, 1976, Daly, 1977; Daly & Miller, 1975a; García, 1977; Richmond & Dixon, 1980), with (c) enrollment in advanced writing courses (Daly & Miller, 1975b), with (d) performance on standardized tests of writing competency (Daly, 1978; Daly & Miller, 1975b; Dickson, 1978; Faigley, Daly, & Witte,

1981), with (e) a person's willingness to write, expectations about writing, and a student's evaluation of the writing course (Daly & Miller, 1975b; Scott & Wheelles, 1975), with (f) gender differences and writing apprehension (Daly, 1979; Daly & Miller, 1975b; Jeroski & Conry, 1981), with (h) occupation and academic choices of the blocker (Daly & Shamo, 1976; 1978), with (i) the assessment of composition programs (Witte & Fagley, 1980), with (j) self-esteem and other personality dimensions (Boice, 1985; Daly & Wilson, 1981), and with (k) cognitive behavior (Boice, 1985). In addition to the correlative studies of blocking, others have focused on reducing writing apprehension (Boice, 1985; Cook & Meyer, 1979; Fox, 1980).

Despite the number of correlational studies of writing apprehension/anxiety, Beach and Bridwell (1984:228) say that they "do not understand completely what causes apprehension nor do [they] know the best ways of reducing it." Daly (1985) adds that studies on blocking are scattered and preliminary and that much of the information about blocking is superficial, a statement repeated by Boice (1985:91). These correlational studies of English monolingual writers reveal, however, that apprehension/anxiety may be caused by the students' negative self-concept, observable in their uneasiness in communicating or in disclosing the self in writing when writing is viewed as personal. Other causes of apprehension can be occasioned by unpleasant experiences with a hypercorrecting teacher who concentrates on the editing

level of writing. Furthermore, apprehension/anxiety may be self-imposed through procrastination of writing tasks, which in turn forces the student to write and exit a piece of writing quickly. This premature closure in writing aims at surviving in the writing class rather than at learning to compose well. In addition, writers may find anxiety ensuing from the topic assigned (few people can write on topics), from the goals of a particular piece of writing (to persuade someone), from the audience (writing to the rector to provide more parking space), or from the cognitive style of the writer (field dependent/ independent).

The field of blocking research with monolinguals has been dominated by Rose's (1984) studies based on the cognitive dimensions of writer's block. Although Rose, who advocates the second model, finds that other affective and motivational variables stymie writers, he bases his work on five cognitive variables of writer's block which can be adapted to the bilingual writer: lateness or procrastination, premature editing, complexity of material, attitudes toward one's own writing, and blocking itself, which produces the inability to write. This study assumes that the cognitive model proposed by Rose is better suited for use with bilingual writers than are the dispositional and situational models of Daly because the scales of Rose's model, which can be linguistic, sociolinguistic, or prescriptive, can stymie monolingual or bilingual writers equally. The research literature in crosscultural composing, as cited above, indicates

that the cognitive processes of first language writers are also employed by second language writers. Thus, we propose that Rose's scales hold between languages and cultures.

Rose's rules, as we propose they apply to both bilingual and monolingual writers, are of five types, as explained below:

1. Rigid rules are those normative, traditional handbook rules which are inappropriately invoked or simply incorrect if they prescribe usage absolutes when the context and the purpose of the writing should direct the writing behavior (e.g. "Never use the forms of be"; or in Spanish, "never use in writing the -ra form of the subjunctive."). These rules become inappropriate when invoked at a questionable time and place in the composing process. An incorrect rule is one that is simply not true (e.g., "Don't begin your sentences with 'but' or 'and', or in Spanish, with pero 'but' or y 'and'").

2. Misleading rules on composing-process assumptions are those beliefs about how the writing process occurs. These rules become misleading when they do not reflect the diversity and complexity of the composing process (e.g., "Writing acceptable freshman themes is as uncomplicated as assembling a simple piece of mechanical equipment" (Flothow & Littleton, 1963: IX-X). Or in Spanish, "A course in composition would consist of an analysis of determined styles" (Suárez-Murias, 1968:289).

3. Rules of premature editing concern the application of cosmetic fixings before the writing is finished. These editing

rules attend to polishing the surface of language on such low-level skills as grammar and mechanics, spelling, and lexical or syntactic inaccuracies but rarely help to improve the content because they occur at the sentence level rather than at the text level. Despite the truism that content and form are inseparable, these stylistic corrections do not effect rethinking by tidying up. Premature editing in any language prevents thinking about content and directs attention to a low level of stylistics. Premature editing in English occurs when students stop their writing to consult a dictionary on spelling. Similarly, students in Spanish stop their writing to resolve, for example, the question of whether the Spanish González is spelled with two z's or one and whether either choice would force the use/nonuse of an orthographic accent.

4. Complexity rules for strategies in interpreting and writing tasks distinguish the array of interpretive, planning, and writing strategies that students have culled in their school years from those they need for college writing. The Spanish or English planning strategies that students bring to college are at times dysfunctional because students have learned these strategies as normative and inflexible; thus they do not allow for modification or alternatives. These strategies range from outline writing, or the notion of a linear movement in writing such as "say what you are going to say, say it, and then say what you have said." Such school strategies for planning ignore individual differences or

the writer's authentic voice. Students entering college in Puerto Rico lack the higher order skills needed to articulate the parts of discourse in specific writing situations in both languages. Although they possess the straightforwardness of the simple chronological pattern of narration or the spatial, object-referenced structure of description, they normally lack the higher-level exposition modes (i.e. classification, comparison and contrast, analysis, etc.) and types of argument that call for abstract frameworks of writing or "generalizing and theorizing" (Moffett, 1968). Higher-level exposition usually stumps the novice college writer for cognitive and linguistic reasons because higher level exposition encompasses the conception and planning of material as well as the generating and shaping of written language. Rose (1984) says that cognitive and linguistic processes are not identical, but suggests that

The abilities to interpret writing tasks, plan for them, and produce and structure language to accommodate them are, in general, related and must be considered in a discussion of either stymied or fluent composing.  
(p. 124)

5. Excluded from rules 1-4 are problems in interpreting, planning, writing, and conflict. The problem of interpretation ensues when students fail to separate the pertinent from the unnecessary in lengthy material and produce, as a result, an array of undifferentiated material. Conflict in students' writing

arises as a cognitive discord between rules, strategies, or assumptions. Because the writer composes with numerous composing subprocesses at once, these strategies, rules, and assumptions may conflict. For example, in English, the student may try to avoid the passive construction and the use of "I" in the same essay. Similarly, a Hispanic student may want to write about a body of unexplored data or experience in polished rhetorical style.

On the basis of these five rules, Rose (1984) devised a 24-item questionnaire (see Appendix A) which offers a "confirmation of the study's assumption that a considerable dimension of writer's block involves cognitive/behavioral and cognitive/attitudinal variables" (p. 12). For bilingual writers, these variables may be compounded because of the interplay of two languages in composing, particularly in English, the subordinate language for most of the students. The questionnaire provides insights into the attitudes, strategies, and processes students juggle in writing. The questions can be grouped into the five variables of lateness, premature editing, complexity of material, attitudes, and blocking.

Using a correlational analysis, Rose (1984) showed that the questions did cluster into the five variables. To our knowledge, this study is the first application of Rose's questionnaire to bilingual writers, but we expect that Rose's five variables will cluster differentially depending on the language used by the

writer. In addition, the data will be used to quantify the different factors involved in blocking.

Research on writer's block in both the monolingual and bilingual writer is of educational interest not only because it defines the causes of writer's block but also because it reveals that blocking may determine the career choices students make or the college courses they select. Blocking then is not just a matter of discomfort in writing or an internal sense of guilt about missed deadlines (Rose, 1985:87). This study, exploratory itself, continues Rose's (1984) exploratory work in the sense that it provides another window (the bilingual dimension) through which to look at writer's block. Because of the exploratory nature of the study, it tends more toward the validation of Rose's cognitive scales than toward the clarification of the debate among "writer's block" (Rose), "writing apprehension/anxiety" (Daly, Holland, Bloom, and others), or Jungian "psychological types" (Jensen & DiTiberio).

In the study of blocked bilingual writers, we deal with three composing problems for either language. These problems are in Rose's (1980, 1984) terms (a) linguistic, which result from lack of knowledge of the rules of language but which can be resolved by consulting a handbook, (b) affective, which are caused by the writers' own perception of the reader's reaction to their work, and (c) cognitive, which are related to unproductive strategies such as early closure or premature editing. These

three problems, we expect, will operate differentially depending on the language of composing.

We expect, furthermore, that these writers will overuse the monitor (Krashen, 1982) when they are writing in their second language more than would the first language writers Rose describes (1980, 1984). Though Jones (1985: 114) finds "obvious parallels between the cognitive strategies that characterize the blocking writer (Rose, 1980, 1984) and those typical of the monitor overuser," we hypothesize that these bilingual subjects will show evidence of closer monitoring of their English composing than of their Spanish composing.

#### Methods

##### Rationale for the study

In this descriptive study of the sources of writer's block in bilinguals, the authors assumed that the writing process is universal while not dismissing the idea that there might be nationally preferred styles of writing even within the Hispanic world itself. We also assumed intercultural similarity in the writing process but stylistic variation in the product in obedience to a perceived national writing style. These assumptions are supported by the existing literature on the composing process in English as a first language discussed above, by the literature reporting both theory and research on the development of writing as a subsystem of English (Bereiter, 1980), by research showing

that the overall composing process is the same in English as a first language and English as a second language, cited previously, and by the research on writer's anxiety and apprehension, particularly blocking, cited above.

The research on writer's block conducted with native speakers of English show that writers block for different reasons (Rose, 1984). In this study, we will examine whether bilingual writers claim different sources of blocking and whether these sources are independent of the language of composing. We are assuming that the subjects of this study have less difficulty in putting their thoughts in writing in their native language, Spanish, than in their second language, English. We expect, therefore, that the subjects will invoke different reasons for blocking in Spanish and English.

The study posits that the theory of transfer and interference in second language learning (Edelsky, 1982; Jacob, 1982; Pike, 1960) applies equally to the writing as to the language learning process. Therefore, we should expect the novice bilingual writer to invoke stymying rules similar to those invoked by the practiced writers in English. We further hypothesize that these stymying rules are of an enduring nature when unattended by remediation, but that they disappear with practice in writing.

#### Subjects

Three groups of bilingual students at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez were selected to complete Rose's (1984)

questionnaire on blocking. All students were tested as a group during class time. The first group of 20 Ss were in the second semester of "English Reading and Composition," having placed directly into the composition course on the basis of their scores in the English as a Second Language Achievement Test (ESLAT) given by the College Entrance Examination Board. The second group of 20 Ss were enrolled in an optional Spanish composition course, having taken one semester of required Spanish Grammar. The third group of 20 Ss consisted of English graduate students in the Master of Arts in English Education at the University, for a total of 60 Ss. The first two groups were considered to consist of novice writers; the third was considered to be a sample of practiced writers in English because of their recent writing experience and the research papers required in every graduate course.

The subjects (Ss) of this study had been taught a similar approach to writing, one discourse mode, academic exposition, and one kind of audience, the academic reader. They have been trained to write hierarchically, to move from broad, goal-oriented concerns to the production of specific, edited sentences, in what has been called the "top-down" orientation. This orientation is atypical in Puerto Rico, where the bottom-up orientation, moving from word to sentence to paragraph is far more common both in English and Spanish composition instruction. The assumption in the top-down approach is that "more is better" in writing, and that students must have finished writing down their own thoughts

in order to have something to edit or block on. Thus, any variation in the sources of blocking in the Ss of this study is not immediately attributable to the writing orientation of the Ss but to culled misconceptions about writing that are carried across their two languages.

#### Materials and procedures

The research questionnaire (see Appendix) has 24 questions subsumable under 5 subscales (Rose, 1984). Each of the 24 questions was answered in a Likert-type response sequence ranging from a low of 1 (almost never) to a high of 5 (almost always).

One of the authors translated Rose's questionnaire into Spanish (see Appendix). Then, a bilingual professor of Spanish translated the Spanish equivalent back into English. The back translation essentially conformed to Rose's original questionnaire but was edited for the bilingual Ss. The Spanish version was then administered to the Spanish students by the same professor who had done the back translation.

Both versions consist of 5 subscales. Blocking indicates a set of behavioral indicators of writer's block (e.g. item 7: "At times, I sit at my desk for hours, unable to write a thing."). Lateness is a behavioral subscale which is a less consistent indicator of writer's block than blocking is (e.g. item 4: "I have to hand in assignments late because I can't get the words on paper."). Premature editing is a cognitive/behavioral subscale which shows that writers edit too early in their writing (e.g.

item 8: "I'll wait until I've found just the right phrase."). Complexity, like editing, is a cognitive/behavioral subscale showing whether the writer knows adequate strategies for the interpretation and writing of complex material (e.g. item 15: "At times, I'm not sure how to organize all the information I've gathered for a paper."). Finally, attitude is a cognitive/attitudinal scale which shows the writer's feelings and beliefs about writing and evaluation (e.g. item 13: "I think my writing is good.").

## Results

### Findings

The data were analyzed in two ways. Correlation and factor analyses, similar to those reported by Rose (1984), was performed to determine whether the subscales were valid in English and Spanish for a bilingual population. The second analysis used a repeated measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), using the subscales as levels of treatment.

Correlations between elements of the subscales. A principle components factor analysis extracted seven factors for the English questionnaire and six for the Spanish, although the small number of subjects in the Spanish group (20) restricts the reliability of the analysis. The loadings were suggestive, however, so we are reporting the results with this caveat. For the most part, the factors agreed with Rose's subscales, although there were a few

minor differences.

In English, the Blocking subscale was subdivided into two factors. The first factor included items 12, 22, and 24 (see Appendix A), all of which deal with the inability to write or finish writing. This factor also included item 4, which was part of Rose's Lateness subscale. Item 4 reads "I have to hand in assignments late because I can't get the words on paper." Clearly, this group of students focused more on the blocking aspect of this item ("I can't get the words on paper") than on the lateness aspect. The second factor included items 7, 16, and 17, all of which dealt with getting started writing. For these bilingual students writing in English, initial blocking and blocking in the middle of the paper were two different aspects of writing.

In Spanish, the Blocking subscale was also divided into two factors. One contained items 17 and 22, both of which stressed the difficulty of writing ("Me es difícil empezar a escribir un trabajo;" "Hay veces que se me hace difícil escribir lo que quiero decir"). The other Blocking factor included items 7, 9, 12, 16, and 24, as well as item 14 (Lateness), 20 and 21 (Attitude). Item 14, in addition to dealing with Lateness, also stresses Blocking ("Se me pasan las fechas límites porque me atasco (get stuck) cuando escribo"). The inclusion of items 20 and 21, which deal with opposing attitudes toward writing, is puzzling; while item 21, which labels writing as an "unpleasant

experience" ("Escribir es una experiencia desagradable para mí") could be interpreted as including blocking, 20 ("Pienso que mis profesores reaccionarán favorablemente hacia mis escritos") is clearly an attitude response. Perhaps the traditionally authoritative stance taken by Spanish writing teachers is associated by the students as a factor in their inability to write freely.

In English, the third factor is the Editing subscale, which includes Rose's subscale items 3, 8, and 18 as well as item 9, which was a blocking item for Rose. Item 9 ("While writing a paper, I'll hit places that keep me stuck for an hour or more") may have been interpreted by these bilingual students as an editing item, since in their writing experience, "getting stuck" often refers to puzzling out sentence grammar rather than stopping for lack of content generation or organization.

In Spanish, the Editing subscale (items 3, 8, and 18) is combined in one factor with the Attitude subscale (items 1, 2, 6, 10, 13, 18). It may be that the traditionally intensive emphasis on editing (accents, spelling) and style in Spanish composition has led these students to believe that "good" writing is "well-edited" writing. Thus, their associations of editing matters with attitudes about writing would stem from their previous writing experience.

In English, the Complexity subscale is broken down into two factors. The first includes items 15, 19, and 23, all of which

deal with organizational aspects of complex tasks. The second includes items 5 and 11, which involve coping with different interpretations of material. Item 21 ("Writing is a very unpleasant experience for me"), an Attitude item, loaded in the first Complexity factor, but very weakly.

In Spanish, Complexity was also divided into two factors. One included items 15 and 19 (organization) and the other with 5 and 11 (interpretation), similar to the factors found in the English questionnaire. Item 23, however, was included in a separate factor with item 4 (Lateness), suggesting that the phrasing of item 23 ("Tengo dificultad con tareas que me piden contraste, comparación, o análisis") might have been interpreted as 'delay' rather than 'difficulty'.

Finally, in English, the Attitude subscale was divided into two factors. The first, which also included item 14 (Lateness), and items 10 and 21 (both of which had weak loadings, .13788 and .13754 respectively), is difficult to characterize. Given that item 14 had the highest loading (.79822), this factor is probably the Lateness factor; items 10 and 21 simply did not engender strong responses from these subjects. The true Attitude factor includes items 1, 2, 6, 13, and 20, all from Rose's Attitude subscale.

To summarize, it appears that Blocking has two components for both the English and Spanish writers, as does Complexity. For the English writers, the rest of the subscales appear parallel

with Rose's, with the exception of the two weak Attitude items and the Lateness scale, part of which seems to be confounded with Blocking. For the Spanish writers, Attitude and Editing appear to be part of the same factor, while there is no clear Lateness scale. The varimax rotation factor loadings for both English and Spanish are given in Tables B-1 and B-2 in Appendix B. The correlations between the components of each of Rose's subscales in English and Spanish are also given in the appendix in Tables B-3 through B-5.

Analysis of variance. Although the factor loadings are suggestive, they cannot be considered conclusive because of the small number of subjects in the Spanish group. Therefore, the analysis of variance was conducted using Rose's original subscales. Because of the unequal number of items in each subscale, the responses of each subject to the questions in each subscale were averaged to give five scores for each subject, one per subscale. This provided a set of interval variables suitable for the ANOVA. Although this approach overlooks variation within the subscales, it does give an overall picture of the major effects.

Of the major factors, only Subscales was significant ( $F(4,212) = 13.397, p < .001$ ). Group was not significant ( $F(2,53) = 1.298, p > .10$ ). However, the interaction of Group x Subscales was significant ( $F(8,212) = 2.518, p < .025$ ). The full analysis is shown in Table 1, while the mean scores for each subscale are

shown in Table 2. The higher the mean, the greater the apprehension/anxiety is shown on that subscale.

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Insert Table 1 about here  
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Insert Table 2 about here  
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Overall, the following patterns can be discerned: Lateness or procrastination was the scale with the lowest scores, indicating that lateness was the least serious problem in all three groups. The other scales varied in importance depending on the group.

When the interaction was examined closely, the three groups clearly showed different patterns of apprehension/anxiety. Differences were tested using the Tukey test for post-hoc comparisons (critical difference = .51,  $p < .05$ ; .63,  $p < .01$ ). The three groups did not differ significantly in their responses to the Lateness scale. On the Editing Scale, the English Freshmen showed significantly more apprehension than the English graduate students ( $p < .05$ ). On the Complexity scale, no significant differences were obtained among the groups, indicating that they

all had the same amount of difficulty when faced with complex material.

On the Attitude scale, the Spanish freshmen showed significantly more apprehension, or a more negative attitude, than both the English freshmen ( $p < .01$ ) or the English graduate students ( $p < .05$ ). On the Blocking scale, no significant differences were found among the groups.

When individual groups were examined, different patterns emerged: Among the English graduate students, the Lateness scale was significantly lower than all the other scales ( $p < .05$ ). The other four scales were not significantly different from each other. Among the English freshmen, Editing caused the most apprehension, and was significantly higher than Attitude ( $p < .05$ ), Blocking ( $p < .01$ ) or Lateness ( $p < .001$ ). Among the Spanish freshmen, Attitude caused the most apprehension, and was significantly higher than Blocking ( $p < .05$ ) or Lateness ( $p < .001$ ), while Lateness caused the least apprehension and was significantly lower than Editing or Complexity ( $p < .05$ ). The complete results are graphed in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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## Discussion and conclusions

The results of this study indicated that writing apprehension had different sources for different subjects, and that for bilingual writers, these sources were dependent on the language of composition and the amount of writing experience the writer had. Interestingly, Puerto Rican undergraduate students showed more attitude problems when writing in their native language than when writing in their second language (Figure 1). This difficulty in attitude stems from the traditional writing method taught in Spanish, with its heavy emphasis on editing and formal details (spelling, accent marks) over the process of composing, content, organization, and completeness. This more negative attitude toward writing in Spanish is then an artifact of the rule-governed traditional method of teaching writing in Spanish, which is based on the perfection of the code (Betancourt, 1976) in spite of the fact that the composition course they were taking emphasized process. A group of students explained these differential attitudes in terms of the notion that printing sanctifies. English, the students concurred, is learned from books and must be hallowed, but Spanish is acquired on the streets and must be ungodly.

When writing in English, freshman students showed the most problem with premature editing, or focusing on the sentence level rather than on the piece as a whole. This premature editing is conditioned through undue emphasis on sentence level grammar in

traditional ESL and Spanish teaching, and the editing-level evaluation which is common in composition classes.

The English graduate students have overcome this problem. As most of them were ESL teachers, they probably felt confident in their ability to produce grammatical sentences. In addition, the sheer volume of required writing they produce in their graduate classes would tend to make premature editing unproductive.

Complexity of material appeared as an equal problem for all three groups. The undergraduates, not having had ample opportunity to deal with complex material before entering the university, lack practice in organizing complex materials. The graduate students, by their own admission, are still having similar problems, since their academic training has often emphasized summary over synthesis.

For all groups, Lateness was the lowest of the scales. The undergraduates, accustomed to in-class writing rather than out of class projects, have no opportunity to procrastinate. The graduate students' considerable practice in completing projects for a deadline has taught them that procrastination is fatal.

Our results, unfortunately, cannot be compared with those reported by Rose (1984). Rose reported only interitem correlations rather than mean scores for the subscales. Therefore, while this study attests to the questionnaire's validity for bilingual writers, we cannot say whether the patterns of blocking shown by the three bilingual groups were similar to

those found for monolingual writers.

In conclusion, the sources of writing apprehension/anxiety, or writer's block, in bilinguals varied according to the language used and the students' writing experience. The causes of these differences hinges on traditional teaching methods and the student's past experiences with writing. The process-oriented model of teaching writing, with considerably lessened emphasis on static rules and sentence-level stylistics, would help to reduce the anxiety caused by premature editing and attitude in undergraduates. From the responses of the graduate students, we can assert that apprehension/ anxiety decreases in bilingual writers with increased writing experience (and maturity). Writing apprehension cannot be eliminated, but it can be lessened.

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## Appendix 1

## QUESTIONNAIRE

## CUESTIONARIO

INSTRUCTIONS

Below are 24 statements about what people do or how they feel when they write. Under each is a five-point scale describing degrees of agreement or disagreement with the statements. Will you please circle the number that best describes your agreement or disagreement with your own writing behavior.

For example, if the statement reads:

I write standing up, like Hemingway.

And if you rarely or never write standing up, you should respond in the following way:

THIS DESCRIBES WHAT I DO OR HOW I FEELABOUT WRITING STANDING UP

|              |           |           |           |              |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| ALMOST       | OFTEN     | SOME-     | OCCASION- | ALMOST       |
| ALWAYS       |           | TIMES     | ALLY      | NEVER        |
| (90 to 100%  | (75% of   | (50% of   | (25% of   | (0 to 10% of |
| of the time) | the time) | the time) | the time) | the time)    |
| (High)       |           |           |           | (Low)        |
| 5.           | 4         | 3         | 2         | 1            |

This questionnaire requires that you reflect on your writing behavior. Some items will be easy to answer, but others might be a little difficult because you'll have to analyze what you habitually do. Try to recall exactly what you did when you wrote a recent paper, so that you can report what you actually do, not what you wish you could do. Obviously, you will not be graded on your answers on this questionnaire. Therefore, you can feel free to report candidly what you do and feel when you write. Again, don't report what you would like to do and feel but what you actually do and feel. As you work through the questionnaire, you might realize that an earlier response wasn't right. If that happens, it is OK to go back and change your answer to make your response more accurate.

Note: THE SCALES ARE NOT ALWAYS IN THE SAME ORDER, but the meaning of the numbers is always the same, thus:

5 = high

1 = low

INSTRUCCIONES

A continuación se presentan 24 expresiones del sentir de los estudiantes cuando escriben. Cada expresión va seguida de una escala del uno (1) al cinco (5). A usted se le pide expresar qué grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo tiene usted con cada expresión, haciendo un círculo alrededor del número que mejor represente su sentir personal.

Por ejemplo, si la expresión dice:

Al igual que Hemingway, yo escribo de pie.

Y si usted raras veces o nunca escribe de pie debía responder como sigue:

ESTO DESCRIBE LO QUE HAGO O LO QUE

SIENTO AL ESCRIBIR DE PIE.

| CASI         | A        | ALGUNAS  | EN        | CASI       |
|--------------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|
| SIEMPRE      | MENUDO   | VECES    | OCASIONES | NUNCA      |
| (90-100% del | (75% del | (50% del | (25% del  | (0-10% del |
| tiempo)      | tiempo   | tiempo   | tiempo)   | tiempo)    |
| (alto)       |          |          |           | (bajo)     |
| 5            | 4        | 3        | 2         | 1          |

La contestación en la escala anterior indica que esta persona "casi nunca" escribe de pie (0-10%).

El cuestionario requiere que usted reflexione sobre su sentir personal cuando escribe. Algunas de las preguntas son fáciles de contestar, pero otras son más difíciles porque requieren que

usted reflexione sobre su costumbre al escribir. Para contestar algunas de las preguntas sería mejor pensar en el último trabajo escrito que usted hizo. Así podrá contestar basándose en lo que usted hizo en vez de lo que usted desearía poder hacer. Por supuesto, esta encuesta no conlleva calificación. Así que usted está en libertad de expresar su sentir personal o aprehensión al escribir. Recuerde que queremos saber cómo se siente o que hace usted al escribir.

Nota: LAS ESCALAS NO ESTÁN SIEMPRE EN EL MISMO ORDEN, pero el significado de los números siempre es el mismo, así:

5= Alto      1= Bajo

---

1. I enjoy writing, though writing is difficult at times. (A1)
1. A pesar de que a veces es difícil, me gusta escribir. (A1)
2. I've seen really good writing, but my writing doesn't match up to it. (A2R)
2. He visto trabajos de redacción verdaderamente buenos, pero los míos no se pueden comparar. (A2R)
3. My first paragraph has to be perfect before I'll go on. (E1)
3. Mi primer párrafo tiene que estar perfecto antes de que yo pueda continuar escribiendo. (E1)
4. I have to hand in assignments late because I can't get the words on paper. (L1)
4. Tengo que entregar mis composiciones tarde porque no puedo poner mis pensamientos en la página. (L1)
5. Writing on topics that can have different focuses is difficult for me. (C1)
5. Se me hace difícil escribir sobre temas que puedan enfocarse desde distintos ángulos. (C1)
6. I like having the opportunity to express my ideas in writing. (A3)
6. Me gusta tener la oportunidad de expresar mis ideas por escrito. (A3)

7. At times, I sit for hours unable to write a thing. (B1)
7. A veces me pasan varias horas sentado(-a) antes de que pueda escribir algo. (B1)
8. When I write, I'll wait until I've found the right phrase. (E2)
8. Cuando escribo, espero hasta encontrar la frase exacta para escribirla. (E2)
9. While writing a paper, I'll hit places that keep me stuck (atorado-a) for an hour or more. (B2)
9. Al escribir un trabajo, hay veces que me atasco por una hora o más. (B2)
10. My teachers are familiar with so much good writing that my writing must look bad by comparison. (A4R)
10. Mis profesores están acostumbrados a leer tanta buena redacción que la mía debe parecerles mala por comparación. (A4R)
11. I have trouble deciding how to write on issues which have many interpretations. (C2)
11. Tengo dificultad en escribir sobre temas que tienen muchas interpretaciones. (C2)
12. At times, my first paragraph takes me over two hours to write.

(B3)

12. Hay veces que me tardo más de dos horas en redactar el primer párrafo. (B3)

13. I think my writing is good. (A5)

13. Creo saber escribir bien. (A5)

14. I run over deadlines because I get stuck while trying to write my paper. (L2)

14. Se me pasan las fechas límites porque me atasco cuando escribo. (L2)

15. I'm not sure, at times, of how to organize all the information I have collected for a paper. (C3)

15. Hay veces que no estoy seguro(-a) de cómo organizar por escrito los datos que he recogido. (C3)

16. I find myself writing a sentence then erasing it, trying another sentence, then scratching it out. I might do this for some time. (B4)

16. A veces escribo una oración y la borro; escribo otra y la tacho. Y así continuó por algún tiempo. (B4)

17. Starting a paper is very hard for me. (B5)

17. Me es difícil empezar a escribir un trabajo. (B5)

18. Each sentence I write has to be just right before I'll go on to the next. (E3)
18. Cada oración que escribo tiene que estar perfecta antes de pasar a la próxima. (E3)
19. To write essays on books and articles that are very complex is difficult for me. (C4)
19. Encuentro muy difícil escribir sobre artículos o libros que sean muy complicados. (C4)
20. I think of my instructors reacting positively to my writing. (A6)
20. Pienso que mis profesores reaccionarán favorablemente hacia mis escritos. (A6)
21. Writing is a very unpleasant experience for me. (A7R)
21. Escribir es una experiencia desagradable para mí. (A7R)
22. At times, I find it hard to write what I mean. (B6)
22. Hay veces que se me hace difícil escribir lo que quiero decir. (B6)
23. I have trouble with writing assignments that ask me to compare and contrast, or to analyze. (C5)
23. Tengo dificultad con tareas que me piden contraste, comparación o

análisis. (C5)

24. Some people experience periods when, no matter how hard they try, they can produce little, if any, writing. When these periods last for a considerable amount of time, we say the person has a writing block. Estimate how often you experience writer's block. (B7)
24. Algunos pasan por etapas en que no importa lo mucho que intenten no pueden escribir casi nada. Cuando estas etapas se prolongan excesivamente decimos que la persona se ha "bloqueado" o tiene aprehensión hacia la expresión escrita. Dé un estimado de la frecuencia con que usted se bloquea o siente aprehensión en la expresión escrita. (B7)



If there is any answer you'd like to change,  
please change it now.

Si usted desea cambiar alguna contestación, hágalo ahora.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.  
GRACIAS UNA VEZ MAS POR SU AMABLE PARTICIPACIÓN.

## Appendix B

## Factor Matrices and Interitem Correlations

Table B-1

Varimax rotated factor matrix - English

|     | Factors |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|-----|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|     | 1       | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    |
| Q1  | -.80    | -.13 | .08  | -.02 | -.09 | -.16 | .16  |
| Q2  | .30     | -.53 | -.29 | -.31 | -.06 | -.09 | .45  |
| Q3  | -.02    | .11  | .34  | .27  | -.55 | -.50 | -.02 |
| Q4  | .53     | .17  | .48  | .15  | .28  | -.01 | .18  |
| Q5  | .05     | .16  | .30  | .10  | .78  | -.03 | -.04 |
| Q6  | -.28    | -.07 | .12  | .11  | -.13 | -.06 | .84  |
| Q7  | .34     | .59  | .46  | .13  | -.01 | .12  | -.11 |
| Q8  | .13     | .06  | .78  | -.04 | .22  | -.14 | -.03 |
| Q9  | .35     | .27  | .70  | .08  | -.03 | .26  | .00  |
| Q10 | -.30    | -.67 | -.13 | -.21 | -.05 | .14  | -.02 |
| Q11 | -.02    | -.08 | -.08 | .39  | .76  | .15  | -.19 |
| Q12 | .54     | .51  | .30  | .07  | -.05 | .20  | .01  |
| Q13 | -.67    | -.22 | -.31 | -.22 | -.06 | .06  | .34  |
| Q14 | .21     | -.06 | .16  | .34  | .14  | .80  | -.19 |
| Q15 | .28     | .32  | -.02 | .74  | -.02 | .27  | .16  |
| Q16 | .03     | .78  | .13  | .19  | -.21 | .08  | -.01 |
| Q17 | .38     | .60  | .07  | .35  | .16  | .28  | -.08 |
| Q18 | .11     | .06  | .83  | .20  | -.08 | .11  | .06  |

## Sources of Writing Block

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|     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Q19 | .13  | .10  | .20  | .81  | .24  | -.00 | -.06 |
| Q20 | -.67 | -.06 | -.14 | -.28 | .05  | -.08 | .32  |
| Q21 | -.06 | -.75 | .08  | .15  | -.25 | .14  | .06  |
| Q22 | .67  | .04  | .36  | .16  | -.04 | .07  | .05  |
| Q23 | .49  | .17  | .30  | .50  | .32  | -.13 | .15  |
| Q24 | .63  | .24  | .19  | -.09 | -.07 | .56  | .20  |

Table B-2

## Varimax rotated factor matrix - Spanish

|     | Factors |      |      |      |      |      |
|-----|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
|     | 1       | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    |
| Q1  | -.20    | -.84 | .10  | -.20 | -.00 | -.14 |
| Q2  | -.02    | .08  | .43  | -.56 | -.26 | -.44 |
| Q3  | -.02    | -.08 | .90  | -.05 | -.06 | .09  |
| Q4  | .46     | .37  | -.21 | .10  | .51  | .36  |
| Q5  | .11     | .23  | .14  | .15  | .10  | .75  |
| Q6  | -.55    | -.66 | .30  | -.02 | -.03 | -.19 |
| Q7  | .51     | .13  | -.16 | .42  | .32  | .15  |
| Q8  | .09     | -.03 | .75  | -.06 | .55  | -.10 |
| Q9  | .72     | .27  | .35  | .29  | .04  | -.10 |
| Q10 | -.06    | -.19 | .18  | -.84 | -.07 | -.15 |
| Q11 | .60     | .07  | -.03 | .07  | -.17 | .64  |
| Q12 | .73     | -.17 | .29  | .34  | -.01 | -.28 |
| Q13 | -.21    | -.81 | .36  | -.02 | .02  | .15  |
| Q14 | .81     | .14  | -.03 | -.04 | .04  | .09  |
| Q15 | .33     | .51  | -.19 | .56  | .39  | .10  |
| Q16 | .54     | .33  | -.43 | -.04 | .32  | .02  |
| Q17 | .23     | .72  | -.07 | .11  | .27  | .49  |
| Q18 | -.01    | -.11 | .87  | -.14 | .02  | .00  |
| Q19 | ..07    | .52  | .23  | .67  | .27  | -.03 |
| Q20 | .65     | .57  | .10  | .28  | .03  | .17  |

## Sources of Writing Block

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|     |      |     |      |      |      |     |
|-----|------|-----|------|------|------|-----|
| Q21 | .82  | .28 | -.03 | -.14 | -.01 | .19 |
| Q22 | -.03 | .64 | .41  | .25  | -.04 | .23 |
| Q23 | .04  | .00 | .14  | .33  | .86  | .05 |
| Q24 | .82  | .09 | -.14 | .10  | .20  | .22 |

Table B-3

## Correlations between items on the Lateness subscale

## English

|         | Item 4 | Item 14 |
|---------|--------|---------|
| Item 4  | 1.00   |         |
| Item 14 | .24    | 1.00    |

## Spanish

|         | Item 4 | Item 14 |
|---------|--------|---------|
| Item 4  | 1.00   |         |
| Item 14 | .59**  | 1.0000  |

\*  $p < .05$ \*\*  $p < .01$

Table B-4

Correlations between items on the Editing subscale

## English

|         | Item 3 | Item 8 | Item 18 |
|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| Item 3  | 1.00   |        |         |
| Item 8  | .22    | 1.00   |         |
| Item 18 | .29*   | .53*** | 1.00    |

## Spanish

|         | Item 3 | Item 8 | Item 18 |
|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| Item 3  | 1.00   |        |         |
| Item 8  | .66*** | 1.00   |         |
| Item 18 | .78*** | .63**  | 1.00    |

\*  $p < .05$ \*\*  $p < .01$ \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table B-5

## Correlations between items on the Complexity subscale

## English

|         | Item 5 | Item 11 | Item 15 | Item 19 | Item 23 |
|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Item 5  | 1.00   |         |         |         |         |
| Item 11 | .56*** | 1.00    |         |         |         |
| Item 15 | .13    | .24     | 1.00    |         |         |
| Item 19 | .25    | .45**   | .55***  | 1.00    |         |
| Item 23 | .36*   | .23     | .48**   | .65***  | 1.00    |

## Spanish

|         | Item 5 | Item 11 | Item 15 | Item 19 | Item 23 |
|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Item 5  | 1.00   |         |         |         |         |
| Item 11 | .46*   | 1.00    |         |         |         |
| Item 15 | .32    | .36     | 1.00    |         |         |
| Item 19 | .35    | .09     | .70***  | 1.00    |         |
| Item 23 | .18    | -.04    | .48*    | .51*    | 1.00    |

\*  $p < .05$ \*\*  $p < .01$ \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table B-6

## Correlations between questions on the Attitude subscale

## English

|         | Item 1 | Item 2 | Item 6 | Item 10 | Item 13 | Item 20 | Item 21 |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Item 1  | 1.00   |        |        |         |         |         |         |
| Item 2  | -.04   | 1.00   |        |         |         |         |         |
| Item 6  | .32*   | .23    | 1.00   |         |         |         |         |
| Item 10 | .27    | .45**  | .10    | 1.00    |         |         |         |
| Item 13 | .60*** | .24    | .35**  | .48**   | 1.00    |         |         |
| Item 20 | .53*** | .06    | .29*   | .22     | .61***  | 1.00    |         |
| Item 21 | .11    | .25    | .11    | .32*    | .19     | .14     | 1.00    |

## Spanish

|         | Item 1 | Item 2 | Item 6  | Item 10 | Item 13 | Item 20 | Item 21 |
|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Item 1  | 1.00   |        |         |         |         |         |         |
| Item 2  | .16    | 1.00   |         |         |         |         |         |
| Item 6  | .74*** | .25    | 1.00    |         |         |         |         |
| Item 10 | .30    | .61**  | .29     | 1.00    |         |         |         |
| Item 13 | .70*** | .09    | .71***  | .32     | 1.00    |         |         |
| Item 20 | -.61** | -.09   | -.68*** | -.38*   | -.55**  | 1.00    |         |
| Item 21 | -.38   | -.10   | -.72*** | -.06    | -.38*   | .59**   | 1.00    |

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 1

Analysis of variance with repeated measures on blocking subscales

| Source            | SS        | df  | M.S.    | F           |
|-------------------|-----------|-----|---------|-------------|
| Total             | 195.28320 | 279 |         |             |
| Between           | 83.32660  | 55  |         |             |
| Groups            | 3.89040   | 2   | 1.94520 | 1.29784     |
| Error Between     | 79.43620  | 53  | 1.49880 |             |
| Within            | 111.95660 | 224 |         |             |
| Subscales         | 20.99780  | 4   | 5.24945 | 13.39740*** |
| Group x Subscales | 7.89170   | 8   | 0.98646 | 2.51760**   |
| Error Within      | 83.06710  | 212 | 0.39183 |             |

\*  $p < .05$ \*\*  $p < .01$ \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table B-7

## Correlations between questions on the Blocking subscale

## English

|         | Item 7 | Item 9 | Item 12 | Item 16 | Item 17 | Item 22 | Item 24 |
|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Item 7  | 1.00   |        |         |         |         |         |         |
| Item 9  | .54*** | 1.00   |         |         |         |         |         |
| Item 12 | .58*** | .55*** | 1.00    |         |         |         |         |
| Item 16 | .46**  | .41**  | .43**   | 1.00    |         |         |         |
| Item 17 | .65*** | .39**  | .63***  | .55***  | 1.00    |         |         |
| Item 22 | .40**  | .57*** | .44**   | .20     | .28*    | 1.00    |         |
| Item 24 | .48**  | .53*** | .59***  | .23     | .48**   | .52***  | 1.00    |

## Spanish

|         | Item 7 | Item 9 | Item 12 | Item 16 | Item 17 | Item 22 | Item 24 |
|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Item 7  | 1.00   |        |         |         |         |         |         |
| Item 9  | .52**  | 1.00   |         |         |         |         |         |
| Item 12 | .34    | .66*** | 1.00    |         |         |         |         |
| Item 16 | .49*   | .30    | .27     | 1.00    |         |         |         |
| Item 17 | .48*   | .33    | -.05    | .58**   | 1.00    |         |         |
| Item 22 | .18    | .30    | .13     | .04     | .59**   | 1.00    |         |
| Item 24 | .56**  | .52**  | .44*    | .59**   | .45*    | .02     | 1.00    |

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 2

## Mean Responses to Blocking Subscales

| Group     | Lateness | Editing | Complexity | Attitude | Blocking | Total |
|-----------|----------|---------|------------|----------|----------|-------|
| <hr/>     |          |         |            |          |          |       |
| English   |          |         |            |          |          |       |
| Graduates | 1.625    | 2.334   | 2.365      | 2.464    | 2.501    | 2.257 |
| English   |          |         |            |          |          |       |
| Freshmen  | 1.925    | 2.883   | 2.420      | 2.315    | 2.236    | 2.356 |
| Spanish   |          |         |            |          |          |       |
| Freshmen  | 2.025    | 2.551   | 2.700      | 3.029    | 2.425    | 2.544 |
| <hr/>     |          |         |            |          |          |       |
| Total     | 1.875    | 2.607   | 2.504      | 2.613    | 2.375    |       |

Figure 1  
Mean Responses to Blocking Subscales  
Bilingual Writers

# RESPONSES TO BLOCKING SUBSCALES

